2: Junod M-5 (1895-1909) 1927 Thon

The soil of Spelonken is of a similar nature and very well watered. So the Thongas, who settled in Zoutpansberg, found there a soil which was, in certain respects, more favourable to agriculture than their sandy dunes or their hundjusi on the Coast. 134

Such is Mother Earth for the Thongas. They call it *misaba*, the plural form of nsaba, grains of sand. This word plainly shows that they come from sandy regions. For them the earth is a collection of grains of sand.

II. *Native System of Land Tenure.*

The Native population, taken as a whole, is a very sparse one. Let us consider the Ronga territory, for instance: 100,000 in a territory which may be estimated at 5000 square miles ; this gives a population of only 20 per square mile. The country is, however, very unequally peopled. Natives will only settle in spots where water is found, and, the sand dunes to which I have previously referred being exceedingly dry, they mainly inhabit the slopes of the hills and the immediate neighbourhood of the marshes already described. 162 311 361

To confine myself, amongst the Rongas, to the region in which I have principally travelled, that is to say the neighbourhood of Rikatla, the villages of Nondwane, which extend along a somewhat narrow strip (800 yards wide by 5 miles in length), stretching from the border of Mabota as far as Morakwen, contained in 1880 a population which I should estimate at about 1100 (1). This gives over 350 inhabitants to the square mile. Taking everything therefore into consideration, it may be confidently asserted that the country can easily support its population ; in fact it could support one three or four times as large.

It is important to bear all these circumstances in mind in order to be able properly to appreciate the Ba-Ronga laws relating to landed property. 423

(1) This population has very much diminished since the Ronga Portuguese war in 1894.

423 693 By law the soil belongs to the Chief, but only that, through him, it may become general property. No one can buy land. It is gratuitously assigned to any and all who wish to settle in the country. The mere fact of *kondza*, viz., making submission to the chief (Vol. I, p. 433), entitles the Native to as much land as may be necessary for his subsistence.

423 622 It will be readily understood, however, that the supreme Chief, however small his territory may be, can hardly assume the duty of marking out the various small allotments for his subjects. In ordinary practice this is done by the headmen of the villages (numzane), the important men of the country, (I will call them A), who obtain the grant of considerable tracts of land, which they apportion amongst those under their jurisdiction. They and their near relatives cultivate the most fertile parts of these tracts, or districts, and when any one (say B) wishes to settle on their reserve, they "cut the bush" for him, "tjemela nhoba," to use the technical expression ; they accompany the would-be-settler to an uncultivated piece of land and together they fix the boundaries of a plot of ground which is then assigned to him. A tree, the corner of a lake, a well, or an anthill, may be used as landmarks in this primitive surveying operation. The new-comer will clear as much of the land as he can, till it, and the fields, together with the trees they contain, will become thenceforth his property. Should any of his relatives wish to settle near him, he will, in his turn, assign to them a portion of his land, which they may clear and cultivate ; and so the distribution continues. Supposing B is not satisfied with his allotment, or is unable to live on neighbourly terms with A, and builds his hut in some other spot, he cannot sell or otherwise dispose of his land, as it must revert to A, the original owner. On the other hand, should B die, his wife would inherit his gardens. Should father or mother die, the property would naturally pass to the sons, who would divide the fields between their wives. Thus we see that real estate is hereditary, but cannot be sold. A similar state of affairs would result should A, the numzane, who ranks almost as a petty chief, leave the country : all his rights in connection with the tract that he may have occupied for the last fifty years will cease with his departure.

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It might be supposed that the title to real estate being gratuitously given, was not very secure. Quite the contrary! Once having assigned a plot of ground to B, A has no further interest in it; B is the absolute master of his land and of all that it produces. I recollect one day, at Rikatla, being almost dumbfounded when our own petty chief, Muzila, came to me and humbly asked permission to pick up some of the nkanye fruit, which I had left to rot on the ground! The land at the station (about 5 acres in extent) was granted to us by Maphunga, chief of Nondwane, and here was his relative and representative coming to me, requesting permission to make use of the produce of a tree which was useless to me! And he would, moreover, have made a like polite request to the meanest of his subjects, had he been desirous of making use of anything growing in that man's fields. I must admit that I have often admired the practical character of the Native law in this connection, and, still more so, the respect paid by the original proprietor to the individual to whom he has voluntarily assigned a portion of his land. It is, of course, entirely to the interest of the numzane to keep his protégé on his land, for he adds considerably to its value by cultivating an otherwise useless bush *(nhoba)*. He also helps to people his protector's tract of country, and thus to increase his strength; finally he makes certain payments in kind or rather in labour. The Chief gladly welcomes new-comers, as they will assist in the tilling of his fields each year, and the more labourers he has, the better for him! As for the headman of the village, the possessor of a "small country" (tikwana, dji-ma), his protégés will be always ready to do him a good turn on occasion, and he is therefore quite content to assign to them portions of his domain. Human nature is, however, much the same everywhere, and this system, which appears so perfect at first sight, has also its drawbacks. A numzane, or even a Chief, will give to his favourites the best pieces of land. A clever flatterer, or one knowing how to regale the great man with beer in due season, and thus gain his good graces, will be apt to receive an allotment of good, fertile forest land, while a less fortunate individual, out of favour at Court, will only get a piece of barren hill-side which has

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4/23 622 already been tilled and abandoned as exhausted. I noticed this at Rikatla. Muzila favoured his pagan subjects, who joined him in his drinking bouts, and invited him to orgies in their villages, at the expense of the Christians who no longer brew the byala beer. Thus interest at Court works here as elsewhere, although it be based on nothing nobler than pots of beer!

4/23 578 692 The difficulties of this system also become apparent in the more thickly populated parts of the country, where all the land has been assigned and taken up. The women look round for fresh arable land and may, wittingly or unwittingly, encroach on the ground of another numzane. There is, indeed, a neutral zone, vaguely defined, of which no one has as yet taken possession, as it has not been needed : the wild fruits growing there are common property ; any one who likes can gather them. When the population increases, the inhabitants of the more congested districts go and appropriate this land without any kind of formality. Such was the case when the people of Libombo, dwelling on the edge of the palm-marsh, (to the East of Rikatla), sent their women to the hill-side to clear a piece of land which Muzila considered to be his property. This petty chief sent remonstrances to Nkolele, his colleague, headman of the village of Libombo ; but they were not heeded. Then the men of Rikatla hid themselves in the bushes surrounding the spot in question, and, when the women commenced to hoe the ground, rushed out upon them, seized their hoes, and drove them off. This was the "fait patent," the actionable proceeding, which was necessary in order to have the matter brought before the Chief's tribunal. This incident doubtless led the parties interested to define their respective boundaries more carefully.

4/23 618 To go and till another's land would be quite impossible, even taboo, between people of different clans. In the present case, the Rikatla and Libombo men belonged to the same Nondwane country. There was a good understanding between them. The Rikatla men would not have dared to plough a field without permission on Mabota's ground, the boundary of which was on the other side of the big water-tree (muhlu).

As regards *boundary marks* between the different clans, they

consist of natural objects such as rivers, big trees, etc. To define the boundaries of their gardens, Natives dig an ordinary ditch (ndjilekana, mu-mi) round the field, of about one foot in depth, which can be plainly traced even after the lapse of several years, when the field may have become fallow land and overgrown with vegetation. 423 618

The question of *roads* is a somewhat difficult, and often thorny one to settle. Where has one the right to go ? And if, after having used a certain path for years, you suddenly find it blocked by some individual whose field it skirts, and who has taken a fancy to hoe it up, what is to be done ? To try to come to some friendly agreement is always the most practical course. How often have we not experienced this difficulty with our cart ! The agriculturists were the more annoyed because we required a road three or four yards wide, while the Native footpaths are only little tracks of 15 to 20 inches in width. Being the only "carriage folk" in the district, we often had to ask permission to be allowed to pass, and have rarely met with any kind of refusal, for the Black is a reasonable being and quite appreciates the fact that roads are a necessity. If they see that a road is "ripening" (wupfile), viz., that it is more and more frequently used, they bow before the facts ; here, as everywhere else, custom makes the law. 423 487

At the present moment matters have been made much more simple as the Portuguese Government has constructed wide highways in all the more frequented parts of the country. 177 491

B. PRODUCTS OF THE SOIL.

I. *Cereals.*

"Hosi ya psone i *psithjama*" — "Their king is the *maize*," says Mboza. This cereal is indeed the most widely cultivated in Thongaland. It is called *psifake* in Djonga. In the more fertile regions of the North, the size of the cobs and of the grains (nhleke, yin-tin) is much larger than on the sandy dunes of the Ba-Ronga. So the people of Khosen make fun of the Ba-Ronga and compare 243